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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 001115

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SUBJECT: VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES ACTIVE ON THE TRAIL
BUT NOT MUCH IMPACT

REF: JAKARTA 1099 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Ahead of Indonesia's July 8 presidential election, the three VP candidates are on the hustings and working the crowds hard. They wrapped up their second and final debate on June 30 with none of the candidates gaining a decided advantage. Over all, none of the three has had much impact on the race, with Indonesians naturally focused on the top of the tickets. That said, Prabowo Subianto, a former general and the running mate of former president Megawati, has plowed in huge sums of money to the campaign, seemingly in a dress rehearsal for a presidential run in 2014. END SUMMARY.

WORKING THE CROWDS HARD

¶2. (C) Indonesia's three vice presidential candidates are out on the hustings and working the crowds hard ahead of the July 8 election. Boediono (one name only), President Yudhoyono's running mate, has been traveling throughout the country, speaking at events sponsored by the President's wide ranging coalition. As befits a former head of the country's central bank, Boediono has a bit of a professorial style. This does not make him a huge crowd favorite. His main message concerning anti-corruption is popular, however.

¶3. (C) Wiranto (one name only), a former general and the running mate of VP Kalla, has made a point of appearing at events sponsored by Muslim groups. As with Kalla, Wiranto has been playing a bit of an Islamic card in his comments on the campaign trail, underscoring the importance of Muslim values and ethics and downplaying to some extent the country's more secular foundations. He is not considered to be strong on the stump. During a recent visit to Central Java, however, Pol/C spoke with members of the Muslim group Muhammadiyah who said that they appreciated Wiranto's recent appearance at one of their meetings.

PRABOWO MOST NOTEWORTHY

¶4. (C) Of the VP candidates, Prabowo is probably the most effective. He is a good public speaker, making points forcefully and intelligently. He also has a common touch, working crowds of farmers and the urban poor with some ease (Prabowo served as head of a national farmer's organization for several years). In a discussion about the political situation, Alvin Lee, an MP from Central Java, told Pol/C that he had appeared on a panel with Prabowo last year and been very impressed with his engaging style. Lee noted that he supported the Kalla-Wiranto ticket, but was impressed with Prabowo nonetheless.

15. (C) Aside from his relative effectiveness on the stump, Prabowo is a wealthy businessman linked to a family that is rich, and he has plowed money into the campaign. His large-scale expenditures on TV advertisements during the recent parliamentary election basically helped his new party, Gehrindra, make it over the threshold and win roughly five percent of parliamentary seats. On the downside for Prabowo has been his poor human rights record while in the military, and a reputation for erratic behavior and anger management problems.

16. (C) Given his profile--which has been pumped up by a bombardment of TV ads--there is speculation that Prabowo's real focus is on running for president in 2014. Megawati, a notoriously poor campaigner is lagging in the polls, and it seems very doubtful that she can defeat President Yudhoyono who is very popular. Given this reality, Prabowo--who is fiercely ambitious--seems to be assiduously setting himself up for a run at the presidency in the future by paying his dues on the campaign trail now.

LACKLUSTER DEBATES

17. (SBU) The second and last of the VP debates took place on June 30 in Jakarta. Like the first debate, it was basically inconclusive. Prabowo made a number of populist themed points pressing for free education for all and the rescheduling of foreign debt. Boediono with his deliberate style underlined the need for economic growth through solid investments in education and infrastructure. Wiranto walked around the stage in theatrical fashion, speaking about the need for "a pro-poor government." The final presidential

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debate occurs on July 2. It is not clear how many Indonesians are tuning in to watch or listen to the debates. While there is not much buzz about them, the audience is believed to be a large one.

FOCUS REMAINS ON THE TOP OF THE TICKETS

18. (C) Over all, none of the three VP candidates has had much impact on the race, with Indonesians naturally focused on the top of the tickets. Boediono has probably not lost Yudhoyono--who has a big lead anyway--much support but his political skills are not a particular asset. Wiranto also has not made much of a mark. Prabowo has made something of an imprint, but not even his money and capabilities on the stump have helped Megawati who continues to lag in the polls. That said, even if his VP run fails, Prabowo is on the radar screen as a politician to watch in coming years.

HUME